



THE ROYAL TENNIS COURT



The last toast

RTC lifts the Pol Roger trophy

See page 4

Covid-19 and the (unknown) future - Chairman's report

See pages 2 and 3

Boomerang special

See Page 5

The Spring Newsletter 2020

Number 128

020 8977 3015 info@royaltenniscourt.com www.royaltenniscourt.com

CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

I'd like to start by thanking all members for your continuing support during the Covid-19 lockdown. I won't rehearse again the events that have got us to this point, or the steps we have taken to sustain the Club during this uncertain time. We have sent e-mails to everyone and there is a separate report on all the events of the last year going out from me with the provisional AGM papers. As you will see there, the AGM on 17th May has been postponed to (hopefully) 9th August. We are in touch with all our Professional team on a regular basis. They are keeping themselves active and are in good spirits. While on furlough they are busy but of course not able to take part in activities that would earn revenue for the club.

What I'm sure you would all like to know is how and when the Club might re-open. Here is our assessment. Right now (as I write at the end of April) we have nothing from the Government to go on. All we know is that we have at least another two to three weeks of lockdown and then... who knows?

The first thing that would have to change is some kind of formal relaxation of the lockdown that would explicitly include certain sports - eg tennis, cycling etc - where participants are not in close contact. Another specific category might be gyms where social distancing could be implemented. In either case, I think we might then be able to interpret Real Tennis as being in the same category. We are looking to the LTA for guidance on how they are approaching the challenge and we are also getting advice from the T&RA.

Second, we would then need Historic Royal Palaces either to be ready open the Palace gardens to the public or their agreement that our members could pass through Trophy Gate. With those two things known to be coming into place, the Board and Professional team will propose a way of operating the club and playing again. There will clearly need to be a strong emphasis on personal safety.



Board Talk 03/02/2020 (Pre-lockdown!)

Matters Arising: Tenancy agreements for our professionals housed in apartments have been drawn up, leaving them with the individual Pros to sign and return.

Professional's Report: NW said court usage is at its normal good levels with no causes for concern. Josh Smith is playing in the US Open at Chicago, and is then Chris Chapman's chosen practice partner for the final World Championship Eliminator between Chris and Camden Riviere in Boston. The Board fully support this opportunity for Josh as a part of his development as RTC's Tournament Professional. Scott Blaber, our new assistant professional, is settling in well and demonstrating the professionalism and commitment we expect and need. NW had a productive meeting with HRP's Head of Hampton Court Palace, Lucy Hutchings, who is supporting our needs with HRP.

Finance: IW outlined the 2019 financial performance vs budget, showing a net profit slightly ahead of that budgeted.

The Board had put significant focus on refurbishing club Pro apartments. The write off of the depreciation on the capital cost of the court lights will be complete mid-2020. Debt levels have stabilised.

Premises: PM presented his report. The locks on the changing room drawers are being refurbished and members will be able to store their equipment in them for an annual fee. NW and PM are discussing the cost and prioritisation of refurbishment of the Pro room. An audit and 'tidy up' of the archive room is needed.

Membership: The Board is looking anew at the entrance fee for joining RTC, which may be an inhibitor to a potential member's joining. Any such change would require approval from the AGM.

Tennis and Tournaments: The A grade training sessions are now being well received by all attendees. Entries for The King's Goblet are open and it is expected again to be over-subscribed.

Social: The Carol Service in December

was again very successful both socially (~230 attendees) and financially. The Chairman's Event will be a quiz night and will take place on Saturday 16 May, the intent is that profits are split between the Junior and the Pro funds. OS is considering how to organise a welcome event for Scott Blaber and family.

Juniors: The Board was very pleased with the progress of our junior groups and with the very successful Queens' Foundation funded visit of 48 children from Macaulay Church of England Primary School in Clapham (where Katy Doy teaches) on 21 January, who were on court for two hours with Josh Smith and Scott Blaber.

Congratulations to the RTC junior team who beat Radley away in the Peter Lucke Hille Cup on 2 February.

Any Other Business: Cloth of Gold Trophy Members have enthusiastically supported a trophy match at Fontainebleau to celebrate the anniversary of the Cloth of Gold treaty.

We envisage at least the same restrictions that we had during the last week we were open ie: singles only, closed dedans, closed club rooms except for providing a waiting area to play, no 10-minute mark, no personal visits to the Professionals' office, distancing on court and especially when changing ends, gloved hand only in contact with the balls, no cash transactions with all payments by card or direct debit. Given the general understandable nervousness about the Covid-19 risk, I expect that this kind of regime could be in place for many weeks or months.

How long will it take to do all this? I think we could switch on to being open as above pretty quickly – a few days perhaps, with an e-mail notification to all members about opening for bookings from a given date. My best guess at when this might be? Perhaps (fingers crossed) sometime in June, but be assured that we are alert to all emerging changes and we are in constant dialogue about getting under way again.

Only when we are open again, as the wider situation continues to ease and we understand how members are feeling, can we start to consider how and when a more normal operating regime might apply, including doubles play, tournaments and so on - and how, eventually and most importantly, we can find a great way to thank all of you for sticking with us through this difficult period.

In the meantime we are in touch with our Pro team on a regular basis. They are keeping themselves active, are well and are in good spirits. Whilst on furlough they are busy but of course not able to take part in activities that would earn revenue for the club. We look forward to seeing them again as soon as possible.

The current crisis is affecting everyone but over the next few weeks you might also spare a thought for Grays, the traditional manufacturer of our racquets in the UK. All of us value their continuing commitment to providing this essential piece of kit, without which we would presumably have to go back to using our hands. Business will be tough for the company in the months ahead so this is a great moment to treat yourself to a new racquet. Once back from furlough, Nick will be delighted to take your order!

Stay safe and I hope to be seeing all of you again, in a suitably socially-distanced way, before too long.

Michael Day CVO

Absent of members, the club is quiet. An appropriate time of reflection. I can almost hear my thoughts bouncing back towards me off the walls (a scary thought in itself). I wanted to break away from Covid-19, its impact, and the myriad of articles on the wonderful ways to get through the challenges. Although interesting and helpful to read, I fancied an alternative.

In the quiet, the court takes on a different persona. When empty, the court is cooler, feels larger and sound moves differently around the space. It feels older, somehow more closely connected to its origins, and one is reminded of the history here.

We are privileged to play here, sharing the Royal Tennis Court with stories that been lived and told over 500 years. The combination of the place, and the people who have passed through here, makes it

Just Joshing (on his own)



special. The court corridor tells of tennis, language, Royals and colourful characters; trademark handkerchiefs, vast wagers won and lost, and matches tied to farmyard animals. A personal favourite is the Privy Purse Expenses entry for the 15th December 1531, which a dive into

David Best's fantastic book, The Royal Tennis Court - A History of Tennis at Hampton Court Palace, will find. In the hustle and bustle of 'normality', it's easy to walk briskly through this history.

Stories from the modern era too: players, World Champions, Championships and Challengers, our fantastic Professionals and wonderful members. We each create stories and share in others. I can't help but wonder what stories are yet to be lived, and will be told in another 100, 200, and hopefully 500 years time.

I am truly grateful to be here. This sport has character and personality I personally have not experienced in any other. We all ought to take an active part in that whilst the court is closed, and when we reopen - as we will. Until we meet again...

Josh Smith

Trebles all round!

The Pol Roger trophy is the amateur level inter-club championships, with each match made up of 3 singles and 2 doubles matches. RTC have made it to the final for the last two years but lost 3/2 both times. Having made routine progress to the final on March 7 this year they were hoping to break the trend against Queen's Club.

Up first were Charlie Packham and James Sohl against Freddie Kalfayan and Richard Elmitt. Charlie and James have been a safe bet all season, combining James's killer instinct at net with Charlie's reliable retrieving. The first set followed this pattern and RTC went ahead 6/3. But Queen's fought back and took it to a deciding set, but some brutal play from James helped RTC to close out the match.

Captain Phil Dunn had his work cut out for him playing Matthieu Sarlangue, one of the top-ranked amateurs in the world. The match was full of excellent tennis and Phil definitely gave Matthieu something to think about; however it was not to be, and the match went 6/2, 6/2 to Queen's.

Next James Watson took on Matt Shaw, where Queen's had the advantage on paper. However, a determined looking James took to the court more quickly than his opponent and won the first set 6/2. The second set was a tense affair with Matt starting to find his rhythm and James losing his accuracy on serve. But RTC's



man found his best tennis when he needed it and won the second set 6/4.

Knowing a win in either of the last two matches would be enough to take the trophy Tom Freeman was up against Jonny Whitaker. Tom dug deep and came from behind to win a topsy-turvy first set 6/5. However, Jonny gathered himself and found some fierce hitting to win the next two sets 6/2, 6/1.

This meant it all went down to the final match, with Peter Wright and David Watson facing Harry Eddis and Ben Boddington. The RTC pair came flying out

of the blocks and stormed the first set 6/0 with some ruthless play, leaving their opponents looking shell shocked.

Queen's, and in particular Ben, decided to throw caution to the wind and it paid off - some outrageous shot-making gave them the second set 6/3. Fittingly it came down to the final set, where Peter and David steadied the ship and some more errors started to show from the Queen's pair. Ultimately RTC's quality came through and Peter and David took the final set 6/3, which started the celebrations and the flow of superb Pol Roger champagne!

A big thank you to all our supporters who made the journey, to Nick Wood for his advice on the day, to Oratory for hosting the match, Nino Merola and Levi Gale for marking the matches and to Pol Roger for sponsoring the competition. *The cover photograph shows captain Phil Dunn receiving the trophy from James Simpson MW, managing director of Pol Roger.*

Results: 2nd Doubles: Charlie Packham & James Sohl beat Freddie Kalfayan & Richard Elmitt 6/3 3/6 6/3. 1st Singles: Phil Dunn lost to Matthieu Sarlangue 2/6 2/6. 2nd Singles: James Watson beat Matt Shaw 6/2 6/4. 3rd Singles: Tom Freeman lost to Jonny Whitaker 6/5 2/6 1/6. 1st Doubles: Peter Wright & David Watson beat Harry Eddis & Ben Boddington 6/0 3/6 6/3

James Watson

Prithee, 'tis happeneth before...

RTC members may be utterly fed up with being denied access to our wonderful tennis court during this coronavirus outbreak, but it is not the first time tennis courts have been shut down to help prevent the spread of an epidemic.

Back in 1665 London was stuck by the Great Plague. This was a bubonic plague that wiped out an estimated 100,000 people, a quarter of the capital's population.

While the plague was raging the authorities took steps to prevent its spread. These measures included the closure of all places of entertainment and games, and 'Such like Causes of Assemblies of People'. These closures included the public Royal Tennis courts, of which two could be found in Lincoln's Inn Fields, another at the Haymarket end of Piccadilly, and several older ones in the City, many attached to taverns.

Royal courts and those in the grounds of the private houses of the

wealthy were probably unaffected, but they would almost certainly have been deserted as first the nobility and gentry fled, quickly followed by Charles II, who went first to Hampton Court and then to Oxford where he felt safer.

It may be of some comfort for members to know that, like a tennis ball, the courts came bouncing back. However, there was a sting in the tail, for the following year the Great Fire of London broke out, and while it helped to suppress the plague it destroyed most of the old wooden-walled tennis courts in the City.

Perhaps we should be thankful that we have not been under the threat of 'Severe Prosecution' and of having our doors padlocked from the outside, with a watchman on guard to make sure no one escaped. Not to mention the dreaded Red Cross painted on the front door should any of us catch this dreadful virus...

David Best



Simon Cripps, left, and RTC members at the tournament welcome reception

History of the Boomerang Cup

In 1993 The Royal Melbourne Tennis Club (RMTC) invited Bordeaux, Manchester and Philadelphia to compete in a teams' handicap event. Manchester accepted the invitation, and in January 1994 a match took place between RMTC and The Manchester Tennis and Racquet Club. The match - singles and doubles - was won by Manchester.

Afterwards players assembled at the house of Allan Willingham, a Melbourne member, and burned a boomerang in his back yard. The ashes were gathered and now rest in an attachment to the Boomerang Cup trophy – and so began the Boomerang Cup. Today it is a teams' handicap doubles competition, with an individual handicap doubles competition. The tournament, now biennial, grew and grew: in January 2007 there were 37 teams and 220 visitors, including 24 from overseas Clubs.

Played in January, the tournament is a great opportunity to escape the northern winter. RMTC members are renowned for opening their homes to visitors, others stay in hotels. There is lots of tennis but also lots of time off - each player plays six or seven days out of the 12, giving plenty of time to enjoy the many delights of Melbourne.

A bonzer Boomerang!

As a first timer to the Boomerang Cup at Royal Melbourne Tennis Club (RMTC) my first impression was the sheer scale of the competition: 165 players across 32 teams from the UK, USA, the Netherlands and Australia. I also realised that this was going to be competitive when I saw the names of Julian Snow and Penny Lumley in the mix!

Teams play in groups in a round-robin section. The top teams move to the finals and the other teams into a keenly-contested plate event. There is also a highly competitive handicap doubles tournament in which pairings play in groups in a round-robin section, with the top pairings moving into the KO stage and the finals.

There is no shortage of Real Tennis on the two courts at RMTC, with the tournament starting on the 11th January and finals day of the Boomerang Cup and handicap doubles on the 25th January. Courts open at 07.15 and finish at 22.00 in order to process all the matches.

The organisation is amazing, with functions and great Australian hospitality throughout. The finals dinner and prizegiving are held at the Australian Club in Melbourne. RMTC even commissioned unique monographs from the cartoonist Michael Lindell ('Miko') lampooning all the teams.

Every team has a nickname and Lesley Ronaldson, Bruce Leith (captain), John Dagnall, Ian Barry and I arrived at RMTC as the Royal Tennis Court Thorns (think Tudor rose...).

I got to Melbourne on the 7th and after visiting my billet in a leafy

glade of the city suburbs went - rather jetlagged - straight to RMTC, walking into the Pro shop and a very warm welcome from Chris Chapman, who gave me a tour of the club. I suddenly felt right at home.

Lesley, Bruce and John took a long look at the fixtures in our group of Hobart Devils, Hardwick Hackers, Ballarat Nuggets and Seacourt Sirens and realised we had landed in a very tough group. The assessment proved correct: we had some difficult matches and only managed to defeat Seacourt Sirens. As a result the Royal Tennis Court Thorns moved into the plate competition only to meet the Scappers, another RMTC team. My abiding memory was facing Vince Scopelitti (one of the organising directors of the Boomerang Cup) and his devastating range of railroad serves, to which I had no answer. The Real Tennis Court Thorns crashed out of the plate.

Meanwhile, in the handicap doubles I teamed up with Ian Barry (honorary Thorns member and fellow West Ham Utd fan) to play our first group match against a local RMTC pairing. I had no idea what to expect but we had tremendous support in the dedans from all our teammates, family and friends.

It was all a bit of a blur but through the intensive use of what I now know is called the African Hunting Dog serve we won 8-1. I was maybe a bit too focused, as Ian actually had to tell me that the match had finished!

For me this was the highlight of the tournament, even though Ian and I won all our group matches

to qualify for the KO stages and came through the last 16, the quarter-finals and into the semi-finals, where we met our match 5-8. An incredible experience and we came off court to a fantastic team bbq that Lesley had prepared, at which we drowned our sorrows.

A huge thank you to my teammates and to RMTC – this is only a small glimpse of what the Boomerang experience is about and the camaraderie shared, especially with the Oxford Unicorns and the Seacourt Sirens, was amazing.

It was interesting to note the other teams' custom-made shirts and rackets for the tournament – maybe something for the Royal Tennis Court Thorns to consider for the Boomerang 2022? The planning starts now!

Simon Cripps

The romance of Romsey

As a sidebar to the Boomerang tournament my doubles partner Ian Barry and I visited Romsey Real Tennis Court, which is unique - but sadly due to be closed and sold. The gentleman caretaking the property told us we were probably playing the last match at Romsey!

The court, one hour north of Melbourne, is a relatively new court built in the 1990s but used in recent times as an art gallery. It was owned by Gordon Cope-Williams who, when he heard about HRH Prince Edward making his world tour of Real Tennis courts in 2018, converted it back to a Real Tennis court in time for his visit. Gordon sadly recently passed away and the property, which includes a vineyard, conference centre and cricket pitch, is now for sale. The future of the Real Tennis court looks uncertain.

As there is no official Romsey club or members Royal Melbourne supplied us with a basket of Romsey balls and we played for two hours. The court has a glass wall behind the receiver's end and is several feet longer than RTC's court. The walls are also made of different materials, which took some adjustment. The viewing galleries are set very high and the ball has an unpredictably high bounce - ball boys would be an asset!

We finished our game with a bottle of sparkling wine from the estate to toast the short history of Romsey. It is sad it may close as Romsey is unique on so many different levels. I think a few RTC members would approve of the positioning of the lounge bar area right behind the glass wall, not to mention the wine on tap from the vineyard!

SC

Loving lockdown? You bet...

RTC's mysterious Night Player finds an empty club rather to his liking

He had seen it all before. After the Great War had removed practically every loved and familiar name from his address book, some filthy pestilence had swept in from God knew where to attack the ranks of those who had stayed on the Home Front. No longer was death limited to the trenches, now it visited the nurseries, the drawing rooms and bedrooms of the homes for heroes, the young and fit its preferred prey. This latest bout seemed to have a different target audience but the results were the same. Quarantine, the tennis court shut down, British horse racing cancelled.

Not that it mattered much to Aubrey St John Harmsworth, the RTC Club Champion of 1934, for funds were lamentably low: non-existent in fact. Friend Taylor, his previous 'banker', was absent, cowering in his cottage. Not that he could blame the little fellow; one of the Elderly Court Blockers, he was understandably nervous of the virus. Never the less, there had been an abrupt thoughtlessness about his sudden absence that rankled.

Wandering into the office he found it deserted. The staff were on Government Furlough, not allowed to lift a finger under the strictures of the rules. Aubrey had a quick trawl through the desk drawers in search of details as to how long this incarceration would last.

"This is a vital update from the Government about Coronavirus" didn't tell him much that he didn't know already - but of more immediate interest was a



handsome leather wallet containing a number of debit and credit cards, all belonging to Gideon Turbot-Fyshe, an accomplished player and a scion of the Hampshire Fyshe.

From his eyrie in the gallery, Aubrey had often watched and admired the lad's spirited play. Before the war he had known the family well. Old Freddie Fyshe and he had shared many a bottle at the Café Royale and Aubrey felt confident that young Gideon would not begrudge him the necessary means for an innocent flutter, indeed he would probably be very glad to do so.

An assiduous search of *The*

Times revealed reports of racing from around the world and his sporting soul yearned for the track. The miracle of technology, combined with Gideon's generosity, would enable him to partake and he hastened about getting the arrangements in place.

In isolation he had the use of the club telephone and Baird's visual miracle in the sitting room, surely it was not beyond the wit of man to conquer these complexities? With the families marooned in their flats, Aubrey was free to solve the technological mysteries undisturbed.

Occasionally an empty wine glass would be noticed or a newspaper tidied away but

these were the only signs of his presence, he was quite invisible. Only the children sometimes stared, as if glimpsing a shadow and wondering what had made it.

A knowledge of the television controls was quickly mastered, Sky Sports discovered and after an hour of hit and miss, the Sky racing channel hove into view. In a delirium of joy, he found instructions of how to set up an account through the club's mobile phone with the Sky bet app.

Never had losing money been so easy. Aubrey was gratified to note that Gideon's debit card expired in October 2021. No fears then of a premature curtailment to the fun.

And the world was suddenly his oyster. The Scandinavian race courses of Halmstead and Ostersund beckoned him to place his bets, from Oklahoma the thunder of hooves around the Will Rogers Downs track quickened his blood and the siren call of Hong Kong's Happy Valley made his restless soul soar.

There was a plentiful supply of the very drinkable house claret, enough beer to ensure that the next three months would be convivial - and limitless funds from the family Fyshe.

Settling comfortably onto the sofa, Aubrey felt he had dealt rather well with this emergency.

As a previous prime minister would have said: "Crisis, what crisis?"

Paul Davis

Tournaments etc - the state of (non) play

News In Brief

The lockdown has played havoc with our plans for RTC fixtures and tournaments, as previous e-mails to members have indicated. With the club now closed for an indeterminate period of time, the Tennis and Tournaments Committee has decided that:

- the King's Goblet, the Summer Pennant and the remainder of the Spring Pennant have been cancelled.
- the Lathom Browne, Harris Watson and Barker Camm tournaments will be completed at their earliest convenience once the court re-opens and it is safe to do so.
- all social matches have been cancelled for the rest of this season.
- for the National League, the cut-off point for matches to be finished is the 19th July. Matches not played by that point will be determined by an

independent mathematician to assign winners and MVPs.

Second, a message and a plea for opinions on the club's tennis and tournament "offer to members":

The club has an extensive programme of national and intra-club tournaments, social fixtures, training and development to offer its members. But is there anything we could do differently? Maybe you have seen or heard of something at another club that we should do here? Or an idea that you have had for a while but have forgotten to suggest?

Now is your opportunity! As we start to plan what the next season looks like we are keen to get your views. Please send your thoughts and suggestions to tennis.and.tournaments@royaltenniscourt.com - any and all ideas are welcome!
Giles Doy

In a spirit of defiance and the pursuit of useless trivia, the club is pleased to announce that the lockdown isn't going to stop us exercising your grey matter! Join us for the **Chairman's Quiz on Saturday 16th May** at 7.30pm, for a 7.45pm start. One slight twist: this quiz will be virtual! Look out for an e-mail dropping into your inbox with further details soon.

The quiz will be streamed on the RTC YouTube channel <http://bit.ly/RTCStreaming> and a Google Form will be provided for submitting answers. Be sure to join us for the chance to be crowned RTC Quiz Champions 2020!
Katy Doy

Missing your tennis? Why not join the online racquet "keepy-uppy" challenge that's doing the rounds on social media? It all started with Adam Player, the Pro at Wellington – it would be great to see as many RTC members try it as possible. Follow this Instagram link <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-Fp18yJzMy/> and remember: it's *ten* bounces of a tennis ball – against the *side* of a tennis racquet!
Giles Doy

Editor's Note: This edition of the Newsletter is e-delivery only as the Club is closed for envelope-stuffing. Members please share this by your personal e-mail if you know a fellow member who only receives a postal copy. This Spring edition will later be combined with the Summer edition to ensure continuity of the printed product. With our tennis future currently uncertain, the Editor would welcome contributions, written or pictured, to the next Newsletter, likely to appear in late August. Please submit copy to newsletter@royaltenniscourt.com.

Thanks, and I hope you keep safe and well. This too will end. *Andy Anderson, Editor*

Wood's (wise) Words

I believe it's the simple things in life that are important: Health and Happiness.

At RTC we are privileged to have such a resolute and determined membership. A membership that enjoys the sport of Real Tennis, an activity that contributes to their health and happiness - though that's not always evident when a handicap point slips away!

The truly determined and resolute characters understand that although a win is often more fun, there is always next time and that *every* time it is both the physical and complex nature of the game that keeps the mind and body stimulated and Healthy.

As to Happiness, regardless of the result joy comes from many different quarters, and all in varying degrees for each participant. The 'W!', the physical or mental exercise, the sense of achievement towards a goal, the sharing of the court and time with like-minded people and friends, where we can lose ourselves in the history and the splendour of Real Tennis, the club and the palace.

Keep it simple, keep it fun and keep it healthy. The Royal Tennis Court and its Professionals is very grateful to a wonderful membership for supporting the club and the game of Real Tennis.

Nick Wood